

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claim 1 (Currently amended): An electrosurgical cutting system, comprising:

a) an electrically conductive blade, said blade having a first surface, a second surface opposite said first surface, and an edge where said first and second surfaces meet, said edge having an edge radius of curvature, wherein a predetermined length of said edge is a cutting portion for cutting biological tissue;

b) a first insulator on said first surface;

c) a second insulator on said second surface; and

d) a source of pulsed electrical energy electrically connected to said blade, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy is configured to apply a plurality of bursts of pulses separated by a burst interval of greater than about 1 ms during which no pulses are present;

wherein said cutting portion has an in-plane radius of curvature that is at least 10 times larger than said edge radius of curvature along the entire length of said cutting portion.

Claim 2 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said edge radius of curvature is less than about 25 microns.

Claim 3 (Original): The system of claim 2, wherein said edge radius of curvature is less than about 10 microns.

Claim 4 (Original): The system of claim 3, wherein said edge radius of curvature is less than about 5 microns.

Claim 5 (Original): The system of claim 4, wherein said edge radius of curvature is less than about 1 micron.

Claim 6 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein along said cutting portion said first and second insulators each have a thickness less than said edge radius of curvature.

Claim 7 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein along said cutting portion said thickness decreases approximately linearly, within a tapering region, as said first and second surfaces approach said edge to define a blade tapering angle.

Claim 8 (Original): The system of claim 7, wherein said blade tapering angle is less than 45 degrees.

Claim 9 (Original): The system of claim 8, wherein said blade tapering angle is less than 30 degrees.

Claim 10 (Original): The system of claim 9, wherein said blade tapering angle is less than 15 degrees.

Claim 11 (Original): The system of claim 7, wherein said blade is submerged in a liquid medium, and wherein electrical pulses provided by said source are sufficient to vaporize and ionize said liquid medium along said cutting portion to form a vapor cavity encompassing said tapering region.

Claim 12 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said blade comprises Tungsten or Titanium.

Claim 13 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy provides pulsed electrical energy with each pulse having opposite polarity than the previous pulse.

Claim 14 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy provides pulses having a pulse duration between 10 ns and 10 μ s.

Claim 15 (cancelled)

Claim 16 (Currently amended): The system of claim ~~[[15]]~~ 1, wherein each of said bursts of pulses has a duration less than 10 ms, ~~whereby thermal damage to said tissue is reduced.~~

Claim 17 (Original): The system of claim 16, wherein each of said bursts of pulses has a duration less than 1 ms.

Claim 18 (Original): The system of claim 17, wherein each of said bursts of pulses has a duration less than 0.1 ms.

Claim 19 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy provides pulsed electrical energy in the form of a burst of pulses having a number of pulses and an energy of each pulse selected such that liquid adjacent to said cutting portion prior to application of the burst of pulses is, at some time prior to completion of said burst of pulses, vaporized along all of said cutting portion.

Claim 20 (Original): The system of claim 19, wherein a total duration of said burst of pulses is between 5 μ s and 500 μ s.

Claim 21 (Original): The system of claim 20, wherein said total duration is between 10 μ s and 100 μ s.

Claim 22 (Original): The system of claim 19, wherein any two time-adjacent pulses in said burst of pulses have opposite polarities.

Claim 23 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein: said cutting portion is at least 50 μm long; and an electric field at said cutting portion varies by no more than 50% along the entire length of said cutting portion.

Claim 24 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein pulses from said source have a pulse duration that is sufficiently long for generation of a streamer and spark discharge, and wherein said pulse duration is sufficiently short to avoid generation of a high current arc discharge.

Claim 25 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said blade is submerged in a liquid medium, and wherein pulses from said source have a voltage selected such that a vapor cavity formed on said blade does not ionize until said vapor cavity extends to said first and second insulators.

Claim 26 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said blade and said first and second insulators are etched together during operation, whereby said edge radius of curvature remains substantially unchanged during operation.

Claim 27 (Original): The system of claim 1, wherein said blade is slidably mounted between said first and second insulators, whereby said blade can be extended to compensate for erosion of said blade during operation.

Claim 28 (Withdrawn): A method for pulsed uniform cutting of biological tissue along a cutting zone of an electrode while immersed in a liquid medium, the method comprising: a) delivering a burst of electrical pulses to said electrode to form a uniform vapor layer surrounding the cutting zone of the electrode, wherein a first

vapor cavity forms in a high field region of said electrode, and wherein said electrical pulses do not ionize said first vapor cavity, and wherein said burst of electrical pulses then continues to vaporize said liquid medium in regions of lower electric field until said uniform vapor layer is completely formed along the whole cutting zone before said first vapor cavity collapses; and b) ionizing said uniform vapor layer resulting in uniform plasma-mediated discharge into said biological tissue contacting the vapor layer.

Claim 29 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 28, wherein a total duration of said burst of pulses is less than 10 ms, whereby thermal damage to said tissue is reduced.

Claim 30 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 29, wherein said total duration of said burst of pulses is less than 1 ms.

Claim 31 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 30, wherein said total duration of said burst of pulses is less than 0.1 ms.

Claim 32 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 28, wherein said pulses have a pulse duration between 10 ns and 10 μ s.

Claim 33 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 28, wherein each pulse in said burst of pulses has opposite polarity than the previous pulse.

Claim 34 (Withdrawn): The method of claim 28, further comprising repetitively performing said delivering a burst of electrical pulses, wherein any two time-adjacent bursts are separated by a burst interval greater than 1 ms during which no pulses are present.

Claim 35 (New): An electrosurgical cutting system, comprising:

an electrically conductive blade having a first surface, a second surface opposite the first surface, and an edge where the first and second surfaces meet, wherein a predetermined length of the edge is a cutting portion for cutting biological tissue;

a first insulator on said first surface;

a second insulator on said second surface; and

a source of pulsed electrical energy electrically connected to said blade, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy is configured to apply a plurality of bursts of pulses separated by a burst interval of greater than about 1 ms during which no pulses are present.

Claim 36 (New): The system of claim 35, wherein the source of pulsed electrical energy is further configured to apply a plurality of bursts of pulses wherein the pulses are bi-phasic charge-balanced pulses.

Claim 37 (New): The system of claim 35, wherein the source of pulsed electrical energy is further configured to apply a plurality of bursts of pulses wherein the pulses have a pulse duration between about 10 ns and 10 μ s.

Claim 38 (New): The system of claim 35, wherein the wherein the source of pulsed electrical energy is further configured to apply a plurality of bursts of pulses wherein the pulses have a pulse duration between about 0.1 to 5 μ s.

Claim 39 (New): An electrosurgical cutting system, comprising:

an electrically conductive blade having a first surface, a second surface opposite the first surface, and an edge where the first and second surfaces meet, wherein a predetermined length of the edge is a cutting portion for cutting biological tissue;

a first insulator on said first surface;

a second insulator on said second surface; and

a source of pulsed electrical energy electrically connected to said blade, wherein said source of pulsed electrical energy is configured to deliver a first burst of electrical pulses to said electrode

to form a uniform vapor layer surrounding the cutting portion of the blade without ionizing the vapor layer until the vapor layer surrounds the cutting portion, and wherein the source of pulsed electrical energy is further configured to deliver additional bursts of pulses to ionize the vapor layer surrounding the cutting portion.